

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 457

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SEOUL 6794

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, KS, JA

SUBJECT: THE KIM TAE-CHUNG CASE--AN OVERVIEW

SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

1. TWO MONTHS AFTER THE EVENT, THE KIM TAE-CHUNG CASE REMAINS UNRESOLVED WITH NO FINAL SOLUTION IN SIGHT. BESIDE ITS OBVIOUS, CONTINUING IMPACT ON ROK RELATIONS WITH JAPAN, THE KIM CASE HAS HAD A CORROSIVE EFFECT ON THE KOREAN DOMESTIC SCENE AND THE IMAGE OF THE PARK GOVERNMENT ABROAD. THE KID-NAPPING ITSELF, KIM'S SURFACING IN SEOUL AND THE SUBSEQUENT DOMESTIC EVENTS STILL UNFOLDING HAVE HEIGHTENED INTERNAL ROKG RIVALRIES AND ARE ILLUMINATING THE INCREASINGLY AUTHORITARIAN, COERCIVE NATURE OF THE PARK GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY ITS RELIANCE, ON THE POLICE AGENCIES AS THE ESSENTIAL INSTRUMENT FOR THE EXERCISE OF POLITICAL POWER. THIS HAS HAD ITS INEVITABLE PRICE--INCREASING PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT THE DIRECTION OF THE PARK GOVERNMENT AND, STILL SMALL, BUT VISIBLE PROTESTS OVER THE PARK GOVERNMENT'S MANNER OF GOVERNING. THESE PROTESTS DO NOT POSE A THREAT TO THE PARK GOVERNMENT'S SURVIVAL; THEY ARE WARNING SIGNS THAT THE ROKG MUST WEIGH.

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CURRENT STATUS OF THE KIM CASE

2. THE ROKG'S PUBLIC POSITION ON THE KIM CASE HAS REMAINED UNCHANGED FROM THE BEGINNING. THE ROKG

CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN NEITHER IT NOR ANY OF ITS AGENCIES WERE INVOLVED IN THE KIDNAPPING. ALSO THE GOVERNMENT CONTIUES TO LAY STRESS ON THE NEED TO COMPLETE ITS INVESTIGATION OF THE CASE BEFORE TAKING ANY FURTHER STEPS. IN ACTUAL FACT, THE KIDNAPPING WAS THE ACT OF ROK CIA, CERTAINLY UNDER THE DIRECTION OF YI HU-RAK AND, PROBABLY WITH EITHER EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT APPROVAL OF PRESIDENT PARK. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE PERIODIC STATISTIC LADEN REPORTS OF NO PROGRESS IN THE ROK INVESTIGATION OF THE CASE, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT ANY MEANINGFUL INVESTIGATION HAS AS YET BEEN INITIATED. AND WE WOULD EXPECT NONE UNLESS THE POLITICAL SIGNALS FROM THE BLUE HOUSE SO DICTATE.

RELATIONS WITH JAPAN

3. THE MANEUVERING OF THE GOJ AND ROKG RE THE KIM CASE HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN DETAIL BY EMBASSY TOKYO AND OURSELVES. DESPITE THE SURFACING OF EVIDENCE UNCOVERED BY THE JAPANESE POLICE AND THE PRESSURES FROM THE GOJ, THE ROKG REMAINS ENGAGED IN ITS PARTICULAR VERSION OF A MINNET, IN WHICH IT HOPES TO OUT-MANEUVER THE GOJ AT MINIMUM COST TO ITSELF.

4. PRIMIN KIM AND OTHERS IN GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE CASE ON RELATIONS WITH JAPAN AND HAVE SOUGHT SOME COMPROMISE OR MODUS VIVENDI TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION. RECOGNIZING THAT AT PRESENT PARK WILL NOT CONTEMPLATE THE EARLY RELEASE OF KIM TAE-CHUNG, THE PRIMIN HAS LOOKED FOR SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACH WHICH WOULD GIVE THE TANAKA GOVERNMENT SOMETHING VISIBLE TO SHOW ITS PRESS AND POLITICAL CRITICS. DESPITE PRIMIN'S EFFORTS, BASIC ROKG POLICY HAS BEEN HARDLINE:

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NO ADMISSION OF GUILT, NO ROK CIA SCAPEGOATS AND NO RELEASE OF KIM TAE-CHUNG. THIS POLICY HAS ITS SOURCE IN ROK CIA, ACCORDS CLOSELY WITH THE INTEREST OF THE ROK CIA DIRECTOR YI HU-RAK, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY HAS REFLECTED THE TEMPER OF PRESIDENT PARK. THE MOST VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF THE POLICY (AND OF RESURGENT ROK CIA POLICY DOMINANCE) WAS THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON THE KIM CASE. THE ROK CIA STAGEMANAGED THE DEBATE WHICH HAS AS ITS DUAL PURPOSES EXPLOITATION OF BLATANTLY EMOTIIONAL ANTI-JAPANESE THEMES AND DISCREDITING OF KIM TAE-CHUNG. WHILE THE DEBATE WAS NOT A "SUCCESS" IN DOMESTIC TERMS, THE ROKG'S WILLINGNESS TO DELIBERATELY RESORT TO ANTI-JAPANESE THEMES WAS AN ATTEMPT TO

THREATEN THE GOJ AND JAPANESE POLITICAL AND BUSINESS
ELEMENTS NOT TO PRESS TOO FAR ON THE KIM CASE. IT IS

OUR IMPRESSION THAT ROK CIA, AT LEAST, BELIEVES THIS
PURPOSE WAS ACCOMPLISHED. AT THIS POINT, INDEED,
THE SOFTER TACK TAKEN BY JAPANESE POLITICAL LEADERS
DURING THE PRESENT "COOLING OFF PERIOD" IS BEING
INTERPRETED BY ROK CIA AS VINDICATION OF YI HU-RAK
AND THE AGENCY. CONTINUING AMICABLE POLITICAL
CONTACTS WITH SUCH JAPANESE FIGURES AS KISHI AND
FORMER AMBASSADOR KANAYAMA REINFORCE THIS VIEW. AS
A CONSEQUENCE THE MANY, AND FORMERLY VOICIFEROUS,
CRITICS OF YI HAVE BEEN MUTED, WAITING FOR THE NEXT
CRISIS POINT IN THE DIALOGUE WITH THE JAPANESE, AS
WELL AS SOME SIGN YI HAS LOST PRESIDENT PARK'S FAVOR.

DOMESTIC IMPACT

5. IN ADDITION TO THE OBVIOUS IMPACT ON ROK
RELATIONS WITH JAPAN, THE KIM CASE HAS HAD
SIGNIFICANT DOMESTIC REPERCUSSIONS. FIRST, AND
MOST CLEARLY, HAS BEEN THE INTENSIFICATION OF
EXISTING RIVALRIES BETWEEN CIA DIRECTOR HI HU-RAK
ON THE ONE SIDE, AND MOST CONSPICUOUSLY PRIMIN KIM AND
PPF CHIEF PAK CHONG-KYU AMONG OTHERS AGAINST HIM.

6. PRIMIN KIM, PPF CHIEF PARK AND MANY OTHERS IN
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GOVERNMENT HAVE VIEWED THE KIM TAE-CHUNG KIDNAPPING
AS A SERIOUS MISTAKE THREATENING RELATIONS WITH
JAPAN AND BADLY DAMAGING THE ROK IMAGE ABROAD.

AT SAME TIME THEY SEE CASE AS LEVER TO MOVE
AGAINST YI PERSONALLY AND HIS CONTROL OF THE
ROK CIA APPARATUS. HOWEVER, DESPITE YI'S
APPARENT ISOLATION AND CRITICISM WITHIN
GOVERNMENT, HE HAS MAINTAINED PRESIDENT PARK'S
SUPPORT TO DATE. AND IN THE PAST TWO MONTHS, THE
ROK CIA HAS NEVER BEEN MORE VISIBLE AS PRESIDENT
PARK'S ESSENTIAL INSTRUMENT FOR THE EXERCISE OF
COERCIVE POLITICAL POWER.

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7. THE BROADER DOMESTIC IMPACT OF THE KIM CASE HAS BEEN MORE DIFFUSE BUT SIGNIFICANT. AS THE MOUNTING EVIDENCE OF ROK CIA INVOLVEMENT UNCOVERED BY THE JAPANESE POLICE SEEPED INTO THE ROK, ANY INITIAL DOUBTS ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE KIDNAPPING HAVE DISAPPEARED. THERE IS WIDESPREAD PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ROK CIA RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ABDUCTION, CONFIRMED BY KIM'S CONTINUED ISOLATION UNDER VIRTUAL HOUSE ARREST. SIMPLY PUT, NO ONE BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT'S STORY. EVEN RANKING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS NO LONGER BOTHER TO ARGUE THAT ROK CIA WAS NOT INVOLVED; THEY ACCEPT THAT AS AN UNSPOKEN, ALBEIT UNADMITTED, PREMISE.

8. AT THE SAME TIME THE GOVERNMENT POLICE AGENCIES, PRINCIPALLY ROK CIA, CONTINUE TO EXERT HEAVY COERCIVE PRESSURES ON THE MEDIA, POLITICIANS AND ANY OTHER WOULD-BE PROTESTORS. THE KIM CASE REMAINS AN UNSAFE SUBJECT FOR PUBLIC DISCUSSION ALTHOUGH IT IS MORE AND MORE OPENLY DISCUSSED.

THE ROK CIA CONTINUES TO MANIPULATE AND CENSOR THE MEDIA ON THE KIM CASE AS WELL AS OTHER SENSITIVE POLITICAL NEWS. THE ROK CIA MANIPULATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN THE KIM CASE WAS A SOURCE OF
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CONCERN AND, IN SOME CASES, SHAME TO THE MORE SENSITIVE OF THE PRO-GOVERNMENT ASSEMBLYMEN.

9. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE OCTOBER 1972 MARTIAL LAW PERIOD, THERE HAS BEEN VISIBLE POLITICAL PROTEST. THE OCTOBER 3 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEECH BY CHONG IL-HYONG HAS SPARKED A GENERAL ADMIRATION FOR HIS COURAGE, EVEN AMONG FELLOW POLITICIANS WHO ARE NOT SO FAR WILLING TO EMULATE HIM. THE CURRENT SMALL BRUSHFIRE DEMONSTRATIONS AT UNIVERSITIES ARE THE FIRST PUBLIC STUDENT ANTI-GOVERNMENT MANIFESTATIONS SINCE OCTOBER OF 1971. GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION TO BROOK NO OPPOSITION AND ITS

TRADITIONALLY TOUGH ATTITUDE TOWARD STUDENTS, THESE PROTEST ACTIONS HAVE MORE SIGNIFICANCE THAN IN EARLIER YEARS WHEN DEMONSTRATIONS WERE MORE LIGHTLY TAKEN.

PROSPECTS FOR THE NEAR TERM

10. WE SEE NO LIKELIHOOD OF A FINAL RESOLUTION OF THE KIM CASE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. CLEARLY PARK WILL NOT ALLOW THE DEPARTURE OF A POLITICAL RIVAL WHOSE PRESTIGE IN KOREA AND ABROAD, HAS BEEN GREATLY ENHANCED BY THE KIDNAPPING. KIM TAE-CHUNG TODAY IS A GREATER SYMBOL OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION THAN HE WAS BEFORE HIS KIDNAPPING. FOR TACTICAL REASONS (THE UNGA KOREA DEBATE, US-JAPANESE REACTIONS) THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT CHOSE TO BRING KIM TO TRIAL NOW BUT WE BLIEVE THE ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT HIM DURING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE INDICATES A DESIRE TO KEEP THAT POSSIBILITY ALIVE.

11. WHILE AVOIDING A "FINAL SOLUTION", THE ROKG NEVERTHELESS REALIZES THAT SOME FORWARD MOVEMENT MAY BE DESIRABLE, IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN TO AVOID UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES IN RELATIONS WITH JAPAN AND INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS. IN DEALING WITH RAPANESE, THE ROKG WISHES TO ESCAPE WITH MINIMUM CONCESSIONS NECESSARY TO ALLOW TANAKA GOVERNMENT TO FEND OFF ITS CRITICS, WHILE
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PROCRASTINATING SUFFICIENTLY TO LET KIM CASE WITHER AWAY IN JAPANESE MINDS. FROM ROKG POINT OF VIEW, THE MINIMUM CNCESSION WOULD BE SOME GENERALIZED APOLOGY FOR EMBARRASSMENT CAUSED JAPAN BY THE CASE, BUT WITHOUT EXPLICIT ADMISSION OF GUILT, ALONG WITH AN ALLEDGED REINVIGORATION OF THE ROK INVESTIGATION EFFORTS, POSSIBLY IN CONJUNCTION WITH JAPANESE POLICE. IF FORCED TO BY GOJ PRESSURES, PARK WOULD RELUCTANTLY CONSIDER RETREATING TO A GOVERNMENT ADMISSION OF GUILT ON PART SOME LOW LEVEL OFFICIALS, APOLOGY, AND IF NECESSARY THE VENTUAL RESIGNATION OF YI HY-RAK. WHILE THERE SEEMS NO PROSPECT OF KIM TAE-CHUNG'S RELEASE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, THE ROK PROBABLY WOULD NOT BALK AT USING SOME APPROPRIATELY VAGUE FORMULATION ABOUT HIS EVENTUAL RIGHT TO LEAVE COUNTRY, IF NECESSARY FOR GOJ PURPOSES.

12. DOMESTICALLY, THE STRAINS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT OVER YI HU-RAK CONTINUE, MUTED BUT STLL VERY VISIBLE. PARK WILL NOT WISH TO LET YI GO UNDER THE APPEARANCE OF OUTSIDE PRESSURES, PARTICULARY

AT A TIME OF INTERNAL POLITICAL PROTEST. HOWEVER,
YI, WHATEVER HIS UTILITY TO THE PRESIDENT, SERVES
AT PARK'S PLEASURE. IF THE COST OF KEEPING YI
BECOMES TOO HIGH OR A SCAPEGOAT IS NEEDED, PARK WILL
SACRIFICE YI. MANY IN GOVERNMENT BELIEVE YI'S
DISMISSAL IS THE EVENTUAL PRICE WHICH MUST BE
PAID "TO SETTLE" THE KIM CASE.

13. THERE IS TODAY IN KOREA INCREASED CONCERN ABOUT THE
REPRESSIVE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT AND ITS APPARENT DIRECTION
TOWARDS GREATER, NOT LESS, RELIANCE ON POLITICAL AND POLICE
COERCION. THE PUBLIC PROTEST SO FAR HAS BEEN
MANAGEABLE AND DOES NOT POSE A PRESENT THREAT TO THE
PARK GOVERNMENT'S SURVIVAL. HOWEVER, CRITICISM
IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DESPITE ITS LIMITED
ROLE, THE PRESS CHAFING UNDER CENSORSHIP,
CHRISTIAN DISSATISFACTION, AND THE ERUPTION OF
SMALL STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS ARE EVIDENCE OF
WIDER CONCERN BY KOREANS, PARTICULARLY AMONG
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THE EDUCATED AND THE POLITICALLY AWARE. THESE
CONCERNS ENCOMPASS THE KIM CASE BUT ARE MORE
GENERAL AND RELATE TO THE PARK GOVERNMENT'S
MANNER OF RULE. THEY ARE WARNING SIGNS THAT
PRESIDENT PARK MUST WEIGH IF HE CONTINUES TO MOVE
IN AN INCREASINGLY AUTHORITATIVE MANNER.

14. IN SUM, WE BELIEVE THE KIM TAE-CHUNG CASE ITSELF CAN
AND PROBABLY WILL BE SUFFICIENTLY RESOLVED IF ONLY
PARTIALLY AND OVER TIME. OUR ROLE IN THE KIM CASE
UP TO THIS POINT HAS BEEN TO PREACH REASON AND A
COMPROMISE SOLUTION TO STAVE OFF SERIOUS, LONG-
LASTING DAMAGE TO ROK-JAPAN RELATIONS. THIS EFFORT
WILL BE CONTINUED, AND WE WILL BE ALERT TO PLAYING
A MORE DIRECT ROLE IF IT APPEARS NECESSARY AND
PRODUCTIVE. THE BROADER CONCERNS WE EXPRESS
ARE DEEPER IN THEIR ORIGINS, WIDER IN THEIR
RAMIFICATIONS, AND MORE DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH.
THEY AFFECT THE FULL RANGE OF OUR ON-GOING
RELATIONSHIP WITH KOREA AND WILL BE THE SUBJECT
OF SEPARATE CONSIDERATION.
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